

# CHARGES

AGAINST THE

PRESIDENT AND COUNCILS

OF

**The Royal Society.**

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BY

SIR JAMES SOUTH,

FELLOW OF THE SOCIETY, AND LATE MEMBER OF ITS COUNCIL.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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It is well known to the scientific Public, that I stand pledged to present to them a work, entitled, “ *On the Conduct of the Royal Society, as connected with the Decline of Science in England; together with Arguments, proving, that before the Society can regain Confidence at Home, or Respect from Abroad, a Reform of its Conduct, and a Remodelling of its Charter, are indispensable.*”

When this promise was made, I entertained the most sanguine hopes, that the book in question, would have made its appearance previously to the approaching Anniversary of the Society; so that any charges it should contain, or any hints it should convey, might be refuted, or discussed, by the Fellows then assembled.

The unceasing attention, however, which the erection of my large Equatorial has demanded, will, I find, effectually preclude the completion of my wish. Aware of this, I have thought it advisable to publish forthwith, a brief outline of those proceedings of the President and Councils, which will furnish the foundation of my future volume.

JAMES SOUTH.

OBSERVATORY, KENSINGTON,  
Nov. 11, 1830.



## CHARGES.

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1. For having kept, during many months, from inspection by the Fellows, the minutes of the proceedings of the Council; and from members of Committees, the minutes of Subcommittees, appointed by themselves; notwithstanding the Secretariat department costs the Fellows, upwards of 580*l.* a year.

2. For omitting to enter on the minutes, letters of Fellows, which conveyed sentiments not pleasing to themselves; or calculated to expose to the Society, the lamentable state of its affairs.

3. For having altered or garbled minutes of the proceedings of the Council, *the originals* being less suited, to the purposes of delusion.

4. As Visitors of the Royal Observatory,

having saddled the country, year after year, with considerable expense, in order that astronomical observations might be pursued uninterruptedly, by additional assistants, through the night,—for permitting the continuous observations to terminate, and the Observatory to be put to sleep, generally at, or even before midnight.

5. Having received intimation that His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex, was anxious to have a seat in the Council,—for having uncere- moniously pronounced his wish *an improper one*; fearing, perhaps, lest the manly sagacity of His Royal Highness, might penetrate some of their mysteries.

6. For having promoted to honour—(I beg pardon, to seats which formerly were honour- able)—individuals, whose observations had, by their marvellous coincidence, created astonish- ment amongst scientific men, both at home and abroad.

7. For having thrown away the public money, by publishing astronomical observations, from manuscripts which *they* considered original, but which the most superficial examination of the *well informed*, immediately detected to be mutilated copies.

8. For having endeavoured to get sent from the country to its antipodes, on an arduous



*public* scientific appointment, under accusations the most serious, an individual, whose self-condemnation is before the public.

9. For having defrauded Sir Thomas Brisbane of his scientific rights; for having published the observations made at his own expense, and in his own observatory, without having even consulted him, on the matter; and for having omitted all mention of those facts, in the work alluded to. Having acknowledged before the Society and its Visitors, at one of its weekly meetings, that the above accusations were just,—for having entered on the journals no minute that such charges had been made by one of the Fellows; and for allowing the predatory volume of the Philosophical Transactions to remain, till the present day, in its original state, notwithstanding six months ago, the President “entirely acquiesced” in the suggestion of the complaining Fellow, “that the Title-page of the volume should be cancelled, and that its Preface should be re-written.”

10. Having procured Captain Kater to make experiments on “Weights and Measures,” which have led to an enormous public expense,—for allowing *those*, whom it was their *duty* to have informed of their failure, to remain in the undisturbed enjoyment of their ideas, “that

the object contemplated by Parliament, had been most happily attained;" whereas it is known, not only to the President, but it is notorious throughout Europe, aye, and in America too, that Captain Kater's experiments *must* be repeated, ere we can pretend to accurate estimations, either of MEASURE, or of WEIGHT.

11. For refusing to discuss the merits of a single paragraph of a "Report of a Committee" unanimously appointed by the Council of the preceding year, which had for its object, "to consider the best means of limiting the Members admitted into the Society," &c.; because the suggestions contained in the "Report," if adopted, would certainly have displaced themselves and their President.

12. For having converted into an eating and drinking party, the visitation of the Royal Observatory; so that His Majesty has been graciously pleased, to transfer the moiety of an honour, enjoyed by the Royal Society *nearly a century and a half!*—to another Society.

13. For having intended to give the Copley Medal last year, for a paper presented to the Society, subsequent to the period when, by established custom, such competition was precluded; and moreover, that such intention was



expressed, before the paper had been read to the Society; circumstances which becoming known to the author of the paper alluded to, caused him to hint to some Members of the Council, that their Medal would not be acceptable; thus placing the Society in the *disgraceful* predicament of having its Copley Medal refused by the individual, for whom it had been unwarrantably designed.

14. For having excluded other scientific men, whose labours had been completed within the customary date, from all competition for the Copley Medal, because they were too indolent, or too ignorant, to adjudge it.

15. For having voted one of the King's Medals last year, for intricate anatomical investigations and disputed physiological deductions, on the evidence of a single member of the Council—the rest making no pretensions to anatomical knowledge.\* And for having adjudged the other for a subject acknowledged by the

\* The distinguished Author of the papers alluded to, is too highly respected for his indefatigable industry,—for his disinterested devotion to his favourite pursuit,—and for the success with which he imparts his knowledge to others,—to need that his merits should be acknowledged by any act of the Royal Society. He must, however, highly prize the adjudication, when he reads the names and smiles at the qualifications of those who pronounced it.

President “to be very little known in this country,” and of which no one member of the Council, knew *anything*, except by report.

16. For having shown the most marked disrespect to our deceased Sovereign, by presenting to those persons to whom such prizes were awarded, empty boxes in lieu of Royal Medals.

17. For having wronged Lieut. Drummond, and other philosophers, both at home and abroad, by not investigating their several claims to the Rumford Medal, during last season.

18. For having allowed the Nautical Almanac to continue a disgrace to the country, so that the Government has been compelled to confide its improvement, to another Society.

19. For having violated the freedom of election, by permitting an officer of the Council, to distribute letters amongst the Fellows, to influence their Votes.

20. Many hundreds of the Society’s funds having been converted into “White Bait, Rose Water, and Sauterne,”—for having urged the propriety of spending hundreds more, because a Vice President conceived that “the business of the Society was transacted at the dinner table;” whilst another officer maintained, that if the system was broken in upon, “the Assistant

Secretary would lose his per centage on the Tavern Bills." \*

21. For having solicited tenders from different printers, as to the terms on which they would severally print the Society's Transactions, and for accepting that of an individual, materially higher than others, because "they did not like any thing cheap."

22. For having shut out from a seat in the Council the "most profound mathematician of Great Britain," to make room for an amiable relative of the President's, who presumes not, to the humblest scientific acquirements.

23. For having voted that the President and *two* Fellows of the Society, were numerically the same, as the President and *three* Fellows; in order to keep a seat in the Board of Longitude, ready for Mr. Davies Gilbert to slip into, whenever he should be driven from the President's chair.

24. For having permitted Mr. Davies Gilbert, in their presence, openly to bargain for his return to the post of Treasurer of the Society, on his quitting the Presidency; whereby the till then

\* Justice to the Assistant Secretary requires me to state my conviction, that the imputation is unfounded. Mr. Hudson is, I believe, incapable of a dishonourable act.



highly honourable office of Treasurer, was publicly refused, both by Captain Beaufort, and Dr. Fitton.

25. For having, in their publication of the Greenwich Observations, shewn such marked inattention to the trust reposed in them by Royalty, that His Majesty, by and with the advice of his Privy Council, has, for the publication of future volumes, extended his confidence to another Society.

26. Informed of the rapid strides which Astronomy was making on the Continent,—for having refused to aid its progress in England, “lest by so doing, they should lose their 1000*l*. a year of the public money, allowed them by Act of Parliament, as Members of the Board of Longitude ;” a sum, they spent one year in rewarding pendulum experiments, which Mr. Babbage has lately discussed *for* them—a sum, which they are reported to have disposed of another year, in buying tables constructed by one of themselves; and which even their own advertising cannot persuade seamen to purchase; but—a sum, out of which they could not spare any year, one single farthing, for rewarding the labours of Captain Thomson, whose tables, and whose rule, for facilitating the reduction of nautical observations, are received into the merchant

service of Great Britain—are employed in the French navy—and have proved a greater benefit to seamen, than did the united services of *all* the Members of the Board of Longitude, from the period of its *unfortunate* formation, until the day of its *meritorious* dissolution.

27. For having obtained, through their Treasurer, Captain Kater, the return of a letter, sent officially to an individual by their Secretary, and for having substituted another in its stead.

28. Thousands of the public money, having been spent by them, on the manufacture of glass for optical purposes—for having gone on floundering in their folly, at the public expense, “because, for their own *characters*, it was too late to retract.”

29. For having, in the midst of their glass-making dilemma, refused the proffered assistance of an English optician, second in merit *only*, to the ever-to-be-lamented Fraunhofer.

30. For having, after six years and a half of experimenting at the public expense, “on the manufacture of glass for optical purposes,” caused it to be more difficult, to obtain good flint-glass in Great Britain, than it has ever been, since the memory of man; whereby they have lost for us, the honour of being, as formerly, the opticians



of the world, and have deprived the revenue, of a profitable branch of income.

31. Having invited foreign glass-makers to transmit their specimens of flint-glass—for having given official opinions of them, at *variance* with *fact* ; and thereby reducing, as far as in them lay, the talents of *foreign* glass-makers to a level with *their own*.

32. Having, under an explicit pledge, persuaded an individual to withdraw a motion, which the Council deemed it inexpedient to oppose,—for refusing, when called upon, to fulfil it.

33. For having buried the Society's *books* in cellars, pronounced by the geologists, too damp even for the reception of *flints*.

34. For having, on the 19th of November last, paid away 2600*l.* of the Society's money without the slightest investigation,—in defiance of a standing law of the Society,—with which they were intimately acquainted,—of which they were reminded by one of the Council,—but which they persisted in disregarding, because “it had not been acted upon for some time.”

35. For having *irregularly* entered on the minutes of the Council, of the 10th of June last, against one of the *best* friends of science and of the Society, an empty threat, which

they had neither the manliness to pursue,—nor the candour to retract.\*

36. For having an average income of 2000*l.* a year, which they spend in mace gilding, picture cleaning, and other frivolities; whilst they purchase not a single book to add to their imperfect

\* The following note is from “*The Times*” of July 8 :

“At a meeting of the Council of the Royal Society, held in the Society’s apartments, on the 10th of June last, the Secretary has recorded the following speeches :

“‘ Captain Kater stated, that he wished to take the liberty of proposing a question upon a subject in which he conceived the dignity and well-being of the Society were concerned. As the Charter invests the Council with the sole government of the Royal Society, and the exclusive management of all its concerns, he conceived that one of the first duties of the Council was that of preserving the statutes inviolate, and of noticing any infringement of them. He therefore requested to be informed whether any and what steps were intended to be taken respecting a publication by Mr. Babbage, entitled, *On the Decline of Science in England*.

“‘ The President thereupon observed, that deeply as he regretted the injurious tendency of Mr. Babbage’s publication, and disapproved of the uncandid spirit which pervaded it, and notwithstanding the violation of the statutes, which had in strictness subjected its author to the penalty of ejection from the Society; he was yet unwilling, in consideration of the past services which Mr. Babbage has rendered to science, to proceed to this extremity; but thought it would be more consistent with the dignity of the Society to wave all further notice of this matter.

“‘ Captain Kater replied, that no one could have a higher respect for Mr. Babbage’s scientific attainments than he had, and that he had been in habits of the most friendly intercourse with him for many years. Nothing but a sense of duty

library,\*—apply to the Government continually for money,—and contribute not a shilling out of their own funds,—for aiding a SINGLE SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION.

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Such are some of my charges against the *Managers* of the Royal Society. Personal animosity towards any of them, I disclaim. For the President, except in the chair of the Society, I entertain the highest esteem; and with pain have I seen him, from the first day of his Presidency, to the very moment I write this, by conduct the most vacillating,—and by good

duty had prompted his bringing this matter before the Council; he felt it, however, also to be his duty to bow with implicit deference to the opinion of the President, and would therefore refrain from offering any further remark upon the subject.”

*Present on this memorable occasion:*

“Davies Gilbert, Esq., President, in the chair; Mr. Charles Bell, Mr. Robert Brown, Mr. Frederick Daniell, Mr. Henry Ellis, Captain Kater, Captain Sir John Franklin, Dr. Philip, Mr. Pond, Mr. George Rennie, Dr. Roget, and Mr. Warburton.”

Really, on finding that some of the above persons joined in such a proceeding, one is led to suspect that the atmosphere of the Royal Society Council-room must contain some pestiferous principle.

\* It is a fact which will be scarcely credited in other countries, that the library of the Royal Society, does not contain a single number of the *Annales de Chimie*!!!



nature the most reprehensible,—involve *himself* in *trouble*, and the *Society* in *disgrace*. Amongst the Members of the present and of the past Councils, are, and have been, many individuals, to whom I have long been tied, by the bands of friendship, and with pain have I known, some of them, sit *mute* in the Council, whilst *opposite* conduct would have *saved* the Society, from those *painful* exposures, which have recently become *indispensable*, for its restoration.

The facts asserted in the preceding pages are indeed appalling: whether the Treasurer, on reading them, may, in the Council, “*request to be informed, whether any and what steps are intended to be taken respecting the publication of them?*” whether, “*notwithstanding the violation of the statutes which will in strictness subject me to the penalty of ejection, the President may be yet unwilling to proceed to this extremity;*” or, whether the Treasurer, in this, as in a former instance, “*may feel it his duty to bow with implicit deference to the opinion of the President,*” be that opinion what it may, is indeed to me a matter of *indifference*: for where AD-MISSION IS NO HONOUR, EXPULSION CAN BE NO DISGRACE.

